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ARE THE JEWS AN INFERIOR RACE?

BY NAHUM WOLF

RECENT anti-Jewish publications abroad are zealously disseminating the idea that the Jews are an inferior race. Based on anthropology and biased by personal psychology, anti-Semitic literature advances the theory that the Jewish race is divested of the higher forms of genius and is to be regarded as an uncreative, imitative, practical, and utilitarian body. Mental inferiority and spiritual impotency circulate accordingly in the very blood of the Jew.

It was in Germany where this theory first sprung into existence, and her illustrious men like Fichte, Schopenhauer, Dühring, Wagner, and von Hartmann were the fathers of it. Whatever opinions one may hold of the general teachings of these geniuses, it is certain that those concerning Jewry were largely engendered by prejudices and as such are problematical and uncreditable. Genius is no warrant against prejudice and a great mind no bar against false presumptions. The wings of an eagle may carry him into the farthestmost ideal regions, but they may also level him to the ground.

Particularly is it so with a prejudice that ranges so wide and far, that knows not the barriers of sea and mountain, human tongue and color, caste and creed, as anti-Semitism unfortunately is. Once born into a society permeated with anti-Jewish ideas, the would-be genius imbues them from his very childhood and remains thereafter slave to anti-Semitism just as the ordinary man. Moreover, the great man, who is bent to carry everything to its extreme, furthers national prejudices to their utmost as well. While with the plain mortals anti-Jewish ideas can be put together in a few syllables, the genius erects out of them a whole philosophical structure—a theory as cardinal and extreme as might be any theory of his on the riddle of the universe.

Such was the case in Germany and other European countries. The average German ascribed whatever qualities he found in the Jew—bad or good, if any—to a certain *superiority* of his. The Jew is banker and gambler in stocks, because his commercial abilities eclipse those of his Christian neighbor. He is amassing wealth and fortune by all means, honest and dishonest, because his brains are saturated with schemes. He is doctor, lawyer, and not hard-working artisan, because to him life itself is identical with a higher station in life and because he is endowed with the nerve to fight and conquer adverse circumstances.

The German philosophers construed a theory diametrically opposed to this. To them it is the inferiority and not the superiority that is accountable for all the qualities of the Jew. He is speculating in stocks, because he is unable to speculate in metaphysics. He is practising law, because he is practical. He is usurer, because he has use for nothing besides money. He is engaged in medicine, because his vision does not penetrate farther than the earthly body, human soul being for him a book under seal and cover. In short, the Jew is a pygmy, bound to the earth, shackled from cradle to grave by all that is concrete and limited.

It was this theory that lent the anti-Semitic movement in Europe all its vitality and gave birth to a literature as copious and profuse as any. Hundreds of writings have since come to light voicing the same sentiment—some repeating in parrot manner all that had been said by the great men, some indulging in attempts at further original thinking. Curiously enough, these theories are beginning to gain a foothold among the Anglo-Saxon nations hitherto regarded as the least susceptible to anti-Jewish teachings. They are even encroaching now upon the shores of America—the land whose very air seems to offer the least nourishment for all those microbes called chauvinism, anti-Semitism, and so forth.

A writer in the February issue of *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* says: "*The Jews have survived one empire after another of their oppressors, but have never had an empire of their own. If success has attended their efforts with all their immiscibility, a character so unattractive, even repellent, their shortcomings even in righteousness and their insignificance in everything else, without poetry, without science, without art, and without character, what shall be*

*the result with the Chinese?''** and so forth, and so forth. We leave it to the esteemed author to hold the character of the Jew in such poor estimation. This is a matter wholly concerning him. Character is, after all, a subjective thing and any attempt to bring it out by objective means, to precisely measure and weigh its value, must prove futile. What attracts one in a given character repels another and *vice versa*. The point to be contended is whether the Jews are a nation with "shortcomings in righteousness, without poetry, without science, and without art."

Considering righteousness, it has been proven by many European students of note that the trend toward criminality is much less represented by the Jewish race than by most of the European nations. While the proportion of crimes committed by Jews against property is in many countries exceeding that of their Christian neighbors, the proportion of those committed against life is tremendously smaller. The hand of the Jewish criminal draws back into inactivity as soon as bloodshed comes into question. Again, the greater proportion of crimes against property finds its sufficient reason in the peculiar socio-economic structure of the Jews. They being a townspeople through historical force and having their economic activity principally absorbed in commerce—a commensurate excess in malefactions against property is quite natural. Bankruptcy and similar cases should especially be considered in this conjunction.

But to turn to the world of mental creation. To take the Bible first. The Five Books of the Old Testament, the Book of Ecclesiastes, of Job, of the Proverbs, Solomon's Song, the Psalms, and in particular the Prophets—are they not the most wonderful, unsurpassable productions of genius? How many books like these is mankind in a position to refer to? Exclude the Bible from circulation and humanity will lose much of its poetry. A great lamp, diffusing voluminous light into our dark nooks, will then be extinguished. It is indubitable that the omnipotent and omnipresent influence of the Bible is not chiefly due to its religious sanctity. It is quite as resultant from its genial visions, wit and philosophy, from its deep-sourced inspiration and enchanting style.

Or we delve into another production of the Hebrew spirit—into the so-called Agada, legends dotted here and there

* "Jew and Chinaman," by William Trant.

in the Talmud and Midrash. Are they not the most poetical creations, teeming with fantasy and wit?

And the Talmud itself, that gigantic scholastic work which elaborated Jewish ethics, is surely a monument to the deep-reaching, analytical mind of the Jew. Many of the Tenaim and Amoraim, the authors of the Talmud, were unquestionably geniuses of the highest caliber.

Taking refuge among the Jewish geniuses of modern times, we encounter the names of Baruch Spinoza, David Ricardo, Karl Marx, Lassalle, Heinrich Heine; Mendelssohn, Bartholdy, and Rubinstein in music; Disraeli; Antokolsky in sculpture; the youthful philosopher Otto Weininger, whose book, *Geschlecht und Charakter*, made a tremendous stir in European philosophical circles; our contemporary philosophers, Henri Bergson in France and Hermann Cohn in Germany; and last but not least Joseph Israels, the greatest painter modern Holland has produced.

We have counted thirteen geniuses of the very highest mark. All of them indicate epochs in this or the other sphere of human culture. All of them are as immortal as is humanity itself. Were we to venture, we could prolong that phalanx of Jewish geniuses by adding many talents of high order, who are still tapping at the door of everlasting fame. But we wish to be as strict and unlavish in bestowing the crown of genius as possible.

Surely the above-named thirteen geniuses suffice to demonstrate the presence of higher genius in the Jewish race—a people numbering only eleven million. One poet like Heinrich Heine—one of the greatest lyrists the world has ever known—or one Karl Marx, whose name is indelibly written in the annals of mankind and is in Europe the nearest known name to those of Moses, Jesus, Mahomet, and Luther—would do to repudiate the statement of Jewish insignificance. So will also the hundreds of highly gifted Jews who are swarming in the literature, art, and science of practically every country and among whom are to be found such universally known names as those of Georg Brandes, Lombroso, Max Nordau, Russia's greatest painter Levitan and Germany's foremost living painter Max Lieberman, Sara Bernhardt, Professor Ehrlich, and many others!

In the face of all these shining lights the argument that the Jews are an inferior race bursts like a soap-bubble!

NAHUM WOLF.